

GENERAL

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## More Watchdogs

Last summer when Senator William Fulbright and two colleagues tried to "muscle in" on the CIA watchdog subcommittee headed by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, the battle was quick, gave off little smoke and an aura of defeat for the Fulbright forces.

At the time Sen. Russell, D-Ga., said he didn't appreciate Fulbright (chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee) trying to horn in on his seven-man group. This was taken as a natural reaction of an office holder with an ordinary amount of ego, as well as a slap at those who claimed the watchdogs were not doing their job.

Fulbright wanted the group enlarged so as to include foreign policy committee members. The Senate vote was 61-28 against and came after a heated five-hour debate behind closed doors. The complaint of the would-be interlopers was that foreign policy makers should be on the watchdog group since the Central Intelligence Agency is active in foreign countries. Moreover, its activities had set off international tempests in more than one country. There was the suggestion that the spy outfit was actually making rather than carrying out foreign policy. In making a stab at enlarging the subcommittee, Fulbright wished to have a direct hand in spy supervision himself, rather than leaving the job entirely to members of the Appropriations and Armed Services committees.

There were cheers from conservatives when Senator Russell and his colleagues blunted the challenge. Now it turns out, the vote was mere window dressing. Rather than calmly admit new members to the watchdog fold, Russell fought it out, stating after

victory, "I don't want to muscle in on his (Fulbright's) committee and I don't want him muscling in on mine." That was in July. Here it is January of a new year and, although the watchdog group has not been officially enlarged to include foreign policy members, they will sit in on all watchdog subcommittee sessions.

The ex-officio members will participate fully in CIA supervision, but Sen. Russell hedged on making the arrangement permanent. He said the compromise would be in effect only through this session of Congress.

What brought about the compromise? Details haven't been divulged. The significance of it, however, should not be minimized. The CIA has a new boss, Richard Helms, who has already tangled with Fulbright and came away a bit mangled. This involved a letter Helms wrote to a St. Louis newspaper praising it for editorializing against Fulbright. The disclosure forced Helms to apologize to the senator. Afterward they smiled bravely before cameras in apparent harmony.

It's possible that Helms and the Fulbrights have decided it would be best to get as many qualified people as practicable in on CIA

supervision. Further controversies surrounding the agency would do neither it nor the United States any good. Critical voices could be muffled.

The compromise also points up a peculiarity of Washington politics. A public or closed-door fight can be more for show than anything else. If the watchdogs were going to compromise, they could just as easily have done it in July as today. In July it was a test of wills. Today as Congress is busy with other things, the Foreign Relations victory is blurred in the 90th Congress mix-master.